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Navigation

HST 195: History of Vietnam War F16 (Escobar 21065)

Home ► Fall 2016 ► HST 195 F16 (Escobar 21065) ► Week 8 ► Week 8 Forum ► Fog of War



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Week 8 Forum

Fog of War

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Fog of War

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, November 13, 2016, 12:48 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Fog of War topic.
To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which question(s) you are addressing . Do NOT simply leave it RE: Fog of War

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All the Questions we would Ask

by Jessica Fialho - Sunday, November 13, 2016, 1:56 PM

If LBJ or Nixon were still alive they absolutely would be able to add to our understanding of the war. Every view point we get increases our understanding of the war. The more viewpoints we have, the more data we are able to use to learn from. If they were filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War they could explain how they viewed the Vietnam war. They could talk to the people and potentially say things they never got the chance to tell us.

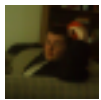
In the Fog of War clip, Robert McNamara points out,

“There is a wonderful phrase. The fog of war. What the fog of war means is it’s so complex it’s beyond the human mind to contemplate all the variables. Our judgement, our understanding are not adequate” (8:20).

He is only reinforcing my belief that if Nixon or LBJ were still alive, they would be able to help our understanding of the war. Robert McNamara made a great statement when telling us what fog of war means. Since war is indeed so complex, any help or viewpoints we get can help our understanding. I am sure there are plenty of questions the world would like to ask LBJ and Nixon.

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Re: All the Questions we would Ask

by Jimmy O'Neal - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 12:45 PM

Hi Jessica, I also think that it would have been a very good thing if LBJ or Nixon could have given us their insight on the war. This could have come from someone that was directly in power, a commander-and-chief, which could have showed us the reasoning behind some of the biggest made decisions of the whole war. I really do wish that they lived long enough to add at least a small amount of what they had to offer for this course, then we could have some deeper understanding on some of the topics.

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Lai

by Treva Thompson-Moore - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 11:51 PM

You are absolutely correct that there would be so much to ask Nixon or Johnson if the opportunity for interview was available. Everything in your post made me think about Nixon's involvement in the Apay section of "My Lai". Where some 500 vietnamese civilians were slaughtered by american infantryman on March 16, 1968. According to Apay this was certainly not a spontaneous attack but rather a slowly done slaughter where soldiers even took smoke breaks. (Apay Book, pg.

43) It is unbelievable that the "fogginess" of every involved general or soldier was so fogged that they claimed only 128 vietcong soldiers were killed and didn't even record the actual statistics of the fight.

He adds in the final last sentences, "Criminal charges were eventually brought against 18 officers, but every one except Lieutenant Calley was acquitted or had his charges dismissed without a trial. Calley was convicted of killing 22 civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment. However, through President Nixon's intervention, he was released after three and a half years under house arrest." (Appy, Pg. 346) This statement proves to me that Nixon could easily have a "foggy" memory just like McNamara. They both have a strong duty to their soldiers when it comes to the battlefield that they seem fine with allowing men to get away with the death tolls just based on being an american. Or on the other hand they are ok with downplaying the consequences of such vicious attacks to save their own government authorities track record.

-Treva

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Influence on survey quetions

by Trever Neal - Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 7:41 PM

How have your responses to these survey questions been informed or influenced by your participation in this course and the materials to which you have been exposed? Is it fair, right, or constructive to pass judgement on the decisions made and course of action pursued (in Vietnam) by the leaders of this nation that came before us?

After what I have learned so far in the class some I believe some of my responses to these survey questions have been influenced. One of my biggest concerns, "A clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world" has only been confirmed. The United States' fear of communism after World War II was one of the key factors to why we got involved with Vietnam in the first place. Another concern that I had was that the "Damage to the global environment will become irreparable." Although I don't believe the use of Agent Orange is irreparable, the effects on the environment and the health of Vietnamese citizens lasted decades. The use of chemical and nuclear warfare could destroy our environment. One of my opinions that has changed due to what I have learned from this class is that, "We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way." If Vietnam wanted to be communist, who are we to tell them they can't be. We cost thousands of American soldiers their lives, destroyed the lives and homes of many in Vietnam, and still lost the war.

I think it's easy to look back and pass judgement on US leaders of the past and the decisions they made. I don't think it's fair to judge them because of what we know now. At the time they had no idea how the war would turn out. I think the only thing you can do is look back and learn from the past and use that knowledge to avoid the mistakes that were made.

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Re: Influence on survey quetions

by Jessica Fialho - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 9:46 AM

Trever, I think you make some excellent points. It is easy to look back and pass judgement on US leaders. Too often this judgement is rushed, and instead of rushing to judge our leaders, we should use the knowledge to avoid the same mistakes. I also see where you are coming from in asking, "If Vietnam wanted to be communist, who are we to tell them they can't be?" First I want to say I agree with you question, but partially. I do not believe we have the right to decide how another country runs their people, just as they do not have the right to tell us how to run our country. However, from my understanding Vietnam called for our help. Are you saying we should not have reached out and helped them despite they asked? I find this class is often changing my view on where I stand if we should have been in Vietnam or not. There are definitely challenging questions that are hard to answer.

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Re: Influence on survey quetions

by Andrew Dellinger - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 5:51 PM

Hi Trevor, I too believe this class has influenced my opinion on foreign politics and how we interact with other countries. However, we disagree on whether or not we should pressure another country to behave a certain way. I think that an important lesson from Vietnam is that some of our fears about communism were confirmed. It did spread throughout Asia, and many innocent people died as a result. Pol Pot led one of the worst genocides in history, and was a direct result of communism in Vietnam. So does America turn a blind eye to dangerous nationalists/communists who are trying to take over a country even though history has shown what those type of leaders can cause (Hitler for example)? I'm interested to hear what your answer was to the survey question: "the United States should use its military-alone if necessary-to stop gross human rights violations, even if this may isolate us from our traditional allies or the broader international community." Wouldn't what I just described fall under human rights violation?

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Re: Influence on survey quetions

by Trevor Neal - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 5:58 PM

Hey Andrew, I do believe the United States should stay out of other countries business, however when it comes to the question you asked about from the survey I did respond that I support it. When it comes to like the genocide of a group of people I think we should absolutely step in to intervene. I do think what you mentioned with Pol Pot does fall in to the category of "gross human rights violations" I just think there was no way we would know it would come from communism in Vietnam.

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Re: Influence on survey quetions

by Andrew Kilmer - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 1:40 PM

Trever-I enjoyed your post. I also think that some of my judgements have been influenced by what I have read and watched. I do however think it is ok to judge leaders of the past (and present) as they are elected representatives. The secrets and lack of information made available to the public at the time is dangerous. The information that the public did receive was slanted by the media (also dangerous). I think our country was just as divided as Vietnam. I feel its crucial that we judge our leaders and our media, especially since we have a similar division in our country right now.

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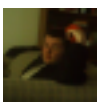
Re: Influence on survey quetions

by Trevor Neal - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 6:19 PM

Hi Andrew, you make a good point that we should judge our leaders, the decisions they make directly affect us. I completely agree that the lack of information made available is dangerous. The media controls whatever information they want us to know or don't. And what they do give us can be altered to make us think another way.

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Looking Back

by Jimmy O'Neal - Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 8:47 PM

From what I have heard from the documentary it would seem like McNamara puts into perspective just how mixed up everything was in the Vietnam war. In the very beginning of the clip we hear him discuss what the war was for Vietnam, which was a civil war, but to us it was just "another aspect of the cold war" (Fog of War, McNamara). This of course lead to a differing view point on how the war should be fought and our understanding of how the enemy was thinking. This is also evident in the Appy book, which shows different stories showing differing opinions on just what the war really was. So thanks to these accounts it clearly shows that the ideology of the war was viewed differently between the US and the Vietnamese.

Also about 5 minutes into the clip McNamara begins to talk about the use of agent orange. As we all know agent orange was a very deadly chemical used in the war which both sides suffered ill effects. While talking about this McNamara states that he doesn't remember authorizing the use of agent orange (Fog of War, McNamara). He states that he might have, but he doesn't really recall giving the okay. This shows that his recollection of the war might be a "little foggy".

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Your words have added a new view.

by Treva Thompson-Moore - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 11:03 PM

Hello,

I appreciate the way you pointed out that McNamara clarified just how mixed up everything was in the Vietnam war. I immediately wanted to place judgement and just chop it up to him being a bias account on most aspects of the War. In your sense it shows me that the confusion of his rememberings is a great example of how contradicting the war was all the way up to the highest officials. Instead of assuming he was purely bias and not one to trust I could have looked at his points in a more constructive way like yourself. However when the "fogginess" is about something that caused so many deaths like Agent Orange it is hard to be "understanding" about his point of view.

-Treva

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The benefits of hindsight

by Nick Cervantes - Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 9:17 PM

With the safety of hindsight, McNamara can more easily reflect on mistakes he made. That's not to say reflection is easy for him (no doubt he still carries unique burdens), but he seems to have learned a broader picture of what was going on at the time of the war. History has been shaped, and the "misunderstandings" are more clear. As the former Vietnamese foreign minister said, the Vietnamese were always fighting for their independence, never to be pawns of any other country. America thought it alone had the key to independence.

As for his 'fogginess,' he doesn't remember if he specifically authorized the use of agent orange. He may be telling the truth, but he has probably been on the defensive for decades. Some fog is self-imposed to deal with the enormity of the history in which he was involved. Some things he just doesn't know.

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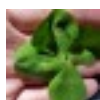
Re: The benefits of hindsight

by Jimmy O'Neal - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 1:25 AM

Hi Nick, while I agree with your above statement about McNamara seeing the bigger picture behind Vietnam's independence, I still think that he should have owned up to his authorization of agent orange. He was the Secretary of Defense and he doesn't recall if he authorized the use of agent orange, a deadly chemical, in the war? It seems ridiculous. You would think that you would remember something like that, but I guess people could say he had the "fogginess" of old age, which could be understandable. But do you think that he authorized the use of agent orange? Could he be acting as though he didn't but really did, or do you think that he might not have?

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Re: The benefits of hindsight

by Jessica Fialho - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 9:20 AM

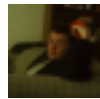
Hello Jimmy, I want to first say I can see where you are coming from in questioning if McNamara indeed doesn't remember if he authorized agent orange. However, I want to point out something about our human bodies. It is often common that our bodies will start blocking events out and we then completely forget them. Sometimes this is replaced by another memory, or sometimes it's just foggy and far in the distance. It is a coping mechanism that just happens against our will at times. I know this from experience, and it can be pretty scary sometimes. I am only 26, and I already block out memories due to traumatic experiences. This isn't a conscious decision on my part. So it is entirely possible McNamara doesn't remember if he authorized the use of agent orange during war. I mean would you really want to be reminded of such a

deadly chemical that you may have authorized? Such a huge decision can actually eat away at someone. McNamara's memory could easily be hidden away and forgotten in a natural response not only to age, but the severity of such a decision. When you are older, do you think you'll remember every decision that had an impact on someone? What about now, do you remember every decision you ever made that could have hurt someone?

That being said, it is also possible he could be using "fogginess" of old age as an excuse. It's possible for anyone to use this because avoidance sometimes is the only way some people can deal with the decisions they have made. Unfortunately there is no way for us to know for sure, but in this case we may want to understand McNamara may not be purposely making excuses and he truly may have forgotten if he authorized agent orange.

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Re: The benefits of hindsight

by Jimmy O'Neal - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 11:42 PM

Hi Jessica, while I do sympathize with the fact that some people may want to block out certain memories I do believe that it is important to own up to your decisions when you are in a seat of power. If anyone is put in such a high position and doesn't want to think about the repercussions of any decisions that had to be made then they probably shouldn't have authorized such a big thing. I understand that this is a selfish outlook on the situation, but this is something that major politicians have to face and I believe that they should face it with dignity rather than hiding behind "fogginess" or just refusing to answer, as we seen in the end of the clip.

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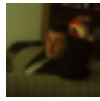
Re: The benefits of hindsight

by Trevor Neal - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 5:57 PM

Hey Jimmy, I have to agree with you on how McNamara should have owned up to using agent orange or not. While watching the video when he explains what agent orange was and how after the war it was "claimed" to have killed many individuals that were exposed to it. Just after he asks if those who gave approval should be considered war criminals. He seems to try to and justify the use of agent orange by playing dumb saying there were no clear law stating which chemicals were allowed and which were not. I believe he authorized it and doesn't want to take the blame for the deaths that resulted from its use.

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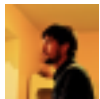
Re: The benefits of hindsight

by Jimmy O'Neal - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 11:50 PM

Hi Trever, this is what I believe is going on. While it is a cruel and harsh thing that happened to both the Vietnamese people and our soldiers it is something that should be owned. If he even had the slightest thought that this may have ended badly and would have looked bad on his part then he should have labeled agent orange as too dangerous to use in the battlefield. This could have not only saved lives but it would have been one less thing to harm and scar our vets for life. As I said in my response post to Jessica, I really hope that he did just forget due to old age. If this is the case then it wouldn't seem like such a underhanded move in my opinion.

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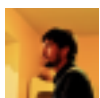
Re: Fog of War

by Nick Cervantes - Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 9:26 PM

If LBJ or Nixon were alive to be documented they would absolutely add to our understanding of the war. The distance of time would have evolved their thoughts about various decisions made. The Vietnam war would pose no more immediate threat to their political standing anymore, and so they could speak more freely about misgivings or controversial opinions. I imagine Nixon would be defensive and arrogant. Extra fog. LBJ would make a more interesting interview because he seemed to morally struggle more with his decisions during Vietnam. From the start to the end of his presidency he had a steep learning curve about Vietnam. He struggled with the prospects of sending more troops in to resolve the war while dealing with public opinion issues that were new to the era.

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Frankel's criticisms and McNamara's perspective

by Nick Cervantes - Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 10:23 PM

In The New York Times, Max Frankel notes McNamara's reluctance to go into anything emotionally--Not wanting to address human costs in his book, like not wanting to take faults in The Fog of War. Frankel is certainly very critical of McNamara, pointing out numerous shortcomings in explanation and regret. He may be right to do so, I'm sure it was a widely read book, but Frankel also has the benefit of hindsight. Frankel proposes that there is a decent limit to loyalty. That McNamara should have denounced Johnson's actions when the body count became too high.

He agrees with McNamara that cabinet members need only answer to the president but argues “This is surely the right ethic for normal times.” (NYT 4/16/1995). I might argue that there are no normal times. The U.S. is always engaged somewhere with civilian and military casualties involved. What is the number to stop at? I don’t believe we’re getting a very complete historical truth from McNamara, nor would I expect to. I agree with Frankel that McNamara is a managerial organizer, fond of statistics. He has his perspective but, at least in the Fog of War clips, doesn’t seem interested in giving us a complete picture (not that one man could). But his perspective, as a major player, is historically valuable.

"McNamara's Retreat." New York Times. 4/16/1995.

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What should we do?

by Nick Cervantes - Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 10:47 PM

It can be constructive to pass judgement on decisions made by leaders in the past. As long as those judgements come from skeptical analysis based on as much information about events as can be reasonably gathered. Right or wrong, we inevitably do have opinions about courses taken, and informed judgement can potentially help guide our decisions in the future. We can try to be fair by examining those leaders on different sides of historical events. My exposure to the materials in this course have slightly influenced my own opinions about the war and probably influenced my responses to the survey questions regarding foreign policy. Notably, I agreed that “The United States should use its military-alone if necessary-to stop gross human rights violations, even if this may isolate us from our traditional allies or the broader international community.” This actually conflicts with my previous response that the US should align itself more strongly with the UN in decision-making. But as long as the US operates the way it does now, I believe in helping where help is needed, even militarily. In conflicts like the one in Syria, you sometimes hear people pleading “Why has the US not come to help us?” And I think sometimes it is because we fear harming contractual relationships. I was influenced by learning about various US officials that seemed to sincerely want peace. But, generally, international cooperation is best.

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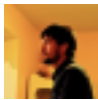
Re: What should we do?

by Jessica Fialho - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 9:34 AM

Nick, thank you for bringing up passing judgement on decisions made by leaders in the past. I completely agree with you that our judgements should consist of a “skeptical analysis based on as much information about events as can be reasonably gathered.” I often see people jump to a judgement before gathering the information available. I feel when people do this it isn’t fair because of how difficult of decisions leaders have to make. I can’t imagine being under that amount of stress and every decision can affect millions of people. It’s unfair when people blindly pass a judgement. I really appreciate the Appy book and its success at telling stories from different sides. I believe this is a great resource that will regularly add to our information gathered about the Vietnam War. The stories are heavy and filled with different perspectives. My hope is that our society may continue to understand that information is important to gather and begin using more resources before impulsively jumping to a judgement. Life is not all black and white. We need to remember that when we pass judgement on a decision made by a leader and we see it as negative, they may have thought their decision was best for the people. Too often we forget that there are leaders who care about the people and do what they believe is in our best interest. Do you agree?

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Re: What should we do?

by Nick Cervantes - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 4:32 PM

Hi Jessica. Yeah, I do think some of us forget that. I certainly have. So much in our political world is reactionary. We take sides so fiercely that there's a shortage of rational discussion (not to mention a huge amount of misinformation on the internet). I'm sure presidents do stress a lot about weighing important decisions (hopefully), and not everybody is going to be happy and mistakes will be made. But government needs to put concern for the governed first. And historical examination and criticism (and of current leaders) is necessary to keep power in check. There will always be disagreements so there will always be a need for democracy. I have my concerns about democracy today but learning about the political climate of the Vietnam era gives me some useful perspective on current events.

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Adding Insight

by Jimmy O'Neal - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 1:36 AM

I think that if LBJ or Nixon were alive they would have been able to add their own insight into the discussion of the Vietnam War. With documentaries such as "Fog of War" we could have seen the after thoughts of both commander and chiefs, which

would have been much bigger than McNamara's in my opinion. This could be because of their own personal stances and beliefs on carrying on the war. I do believe that because of this we could have totally different outlooks on what the war was actually like, which could either be very similar to what we already know or it could be astronomically different. It is hard to say with "what if" situations, but I do believe that it would have been interesting to see what these men would have had to say.

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Selective Fog

by Andrew Kilmer - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 1:29 PM

I feel like the old politician talked a lot but didn't say much. With what we know now with so many accounts for Appy and Herring the information was there from the beginning. Various advisors and military members told 4 presidents and their staff that we were making a mistake. McNamara's notion of a cold war or a civil war didn't play well with me. While its might have been our inclination to prevent communism, outside forces promoted a divided Vietnam.

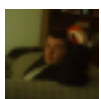
A foggy account of Agent Orange is an insult in my option to all those that were affected by its use. "There was no law against its use", and "I don't remember" are ways of a man justifying his legacy. As mentioned by Alexander Haig (pg. 289), he felt McNamara's abandonment of Eisenhower's full military first attack policy was instrumental in slowing escalating the war and increasing casualties. I think this way of thinking was based on the doubts our leaders had in the war.

I don't feel that LBJ or Nixon would add to the understanding of the war, because clearly our leaders never understood the war. As Daniel Ellsberg eluded to, sending men to die in a war we couldn't win, is not something any leader will admit or concede to. I feel all the above mention leaders could never admit to themselves or publicly the enormous mistakes made. And without a defining admission, we are left with a fog that will never be lifted. I feel this is why McNamara refused to expand on many accounts in the short piece we watched.

One a separate thought, I feel the American media only added to this Fog, but that should probably be a separate post.

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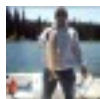
Re: Selective Fog

by Jimmy O'Neal - Friday, November 18, 2016, 12:09 PM

Hi Andrew, I completely agree that McNamara's account of the use of agent orange was disrespectful. He must have issued the authorization of this chemical and now that it harmed our soldiers and did a horrific amount of damage he wants to say that he "doesn't remember" authorizing its use. Although I disagree about the LBJ and Nixon scenario. While they themselves might not have fully understood the war I do believe that they could have added their own insight, creating a clearer picture of what the war was in America's eyes. I would have really liked to hear what these two men had to say about this war and why they chose to do what they felt they must do.

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Re: Selective Fog

by Andrew Kilmer - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 1:30 PM

Thanks for the post Jimmy- The reason I don't think LBJ or Nixon would add anymore to the historical context of Vietnam is their arrogance. Both Herring and Appy's book talk about all the leaders and their lack of ability to accept that American power had little to do with the outcome in Vietnam. There was a generational understanding that money and a superior military was the key to victory. As this problem was handed down from one leader to the next, it seems elections and pride had a lot more to do with the war and less to do with communism. I think we would get the same guarded response from all leaders of the time. I don't think LBJ or Nixon would be willing to admit their mistakes in the wake of thousands of U.S. troops deaths. Even today.

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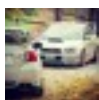
Re: Selective Fog

by Nick Cervantes - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 4:40 PM

Hi Andrew, great post. You're right that 4 presidents had advisors telling them it was a mistake, but they also had some generals and advisors telling them to keep pursuing military options. What they inherited from the French, and then successive administrations, was a sticky cold war situation. At least that's how they perceived it. You make a good point about McNamara justifying himself. The more I think about his response to the agent orange question, the more weak it seems. He claims to have gone strictly by the laws, dismissing the ethical questions of right or wrong.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Selective Fog

by Trevor Neal - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 8:22 PM

Andrew I have to agree with you that if LBJ and/or Nixon were alive today it would not add to our understanding to the war. If anything it would add to the confusion about what is true and what is not. I'm sure if they put out some sort of statement or documentary such as McNamara's they would talk for a very long time but never actually say anything. And if they did how would we know what if it were true? They would not want to take the fall for costing thousands of US troops their lives.

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War's Complexities

by Andrew Dellinger - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 1:50 PM

Robert McNamara's account of the war is yet another example of how complex Vietnam was. I thought "Fog of War" was very interesting, and I believe it definitely adds to our understanding of the events of the Vietnam War. Most of what he talks about is his personal beliefs and concessions so, as we already have discussed multiple times, we can't simply take everything he says as fact. However, we can use his insight to learn more of the complexities of being a Presidential advisor during the war, and just because he expresses his opinion doesn't mean the information has no value. One of the more interesting topics he brings up was in minute 1:36 when he talks of the view of the war on the American side opposed to the Vietnamese side. He says that Americans' viewed the war as a product of the Cold War, but the Vietnamese saw it as a civil war. I never really thought about it as a Vietnamese civil war before, because primarily I've always learned it as a "real" Cold War. It makes sense to call it a civil war, but from our other materials it seems most Vietnamese called it the "American War." I think the most important part of the video though was his admitting to the mistakes he made. He does seem a little "foggy" on some of the topics, such as whether he authorized Agent Orange or not. Either way he admits that we never should have used it, and that if he did authorize it he made a terrible mistake (5:45). The most powerful part of the video is his description of the fog of war. The reality that war has so many variables that the human mind cannot possibly comprehend every factor or every outcome of any decision. This should remind us that although it's important to learn from the decision makers' mistakes, hind-sight is 20/20 and it would be nearly impossible for them to know every outcome of their decisions given the complexity of the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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McNamara's Accountability



by Treva Thompson-Moore - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 3:04 PM

Yes there are absolutely things that McNamara says in the Fog of War video that make me think his recollection could certainly be foggy. In a sense it seems like he is in denial and extremely bias about what he wants to remember and what he wants to talk about on video. He even states out loud “who knows? Well I know certain things.”(Fog of War, 6:44) That statement alone bugs me because he in some way seems to think he can be 150% about only certain things but when it comes to other aspects of the war he says he doesn't remember or can't recall. He brushes a lot on “making mistakes” and pointing out how confused everyone was.

Although I do appreciate his hypothesis that he speaks about during the second and third minute in the video. It surely would be amazing to have a concrete answer to whether or not Vietnamese and Americans objectives could have been met without all the death. (Fog of War) The encounter McNamara had with the former leader of Vietnam in 1995 seems like a subject that he is very confident in speaking about. He speaks with confidence and assurance that he knew why America was involved in the Vietnam war and why Vietnam was wrong because they misunderstood this.

However, shortly after that subject he speaks about Agent Orange and he says, “It was “claimed” to be a toxic chemical...” another expense where he chooses not to admit exactly what he allowed to happen and moreso another misunderstanding. (Fog of War video) The entirety of how Agent Orange has been addressed in this video by McNamara absolutely irritates me. His claim to government work history allows him to go back and forth with his passion and accurateness on subjects that all are very important to one another. Right after exclaiming that he knows without a doubt that he wouldn't of approved an illegal activity he quickly states, “I’m not really sure I authorized Agent Orange, I don’t really remember it...” while he threw his hands up and shook his head. (Fog of War, 5:55) This is where I realized that this man has an extremely biased account and to watch further with caution. Realizing someone like the Secretary of State could be in such a fog during the war and that it took him a long time to fully understand exactly what everyone in the government allowed to happen during the Vietnam War definitely makes me feel better about deeply analyzing every part of our content this course.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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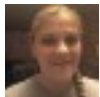
Re: McNamara's Accountability

by Jimmy O'Neal - Friday, November 18, 2016, 12:32 PM

Hi Treva, I agree that the idea of America and Vietnam getting off on the right foot could have saved a lot of lives. If only they had taken the time to understand what the war meant to each other rather than only accepting their own idea of what the war meant then we could have worked together to come up with a much better solution. I also find McNamara's seems to remember about the Vietnam war annoying. In some cases, as we seen towards the end of the video, he claims to know much more about the war than he lets on but refuses to discuss these facts with anyone. I think he might be doing this to save his own hide, like his "foggyness" about the authorization of agent orange. I really wish that he would have just said what had happened during the war that we don't already know. If he did this it would have been a great contribution to what we as a country could learn from this catastrophic war.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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Re: Hindsight is 20-20

by Leslie Stockton - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 7:48 PM

Robert McNamara's "Fog of War" clip is, to say the least, a hindsight on the war. That we didn't know enough about the use of chemical weapons or the Vietnamese people as a whole.

The Vietnamese saw us in his eyes as a replacement of the French colonial power. There to subject the North and South to our colonial beliefs and interests. While the Vietnamese were fighting a civil war. Neither the U.S or Vietnam on the same page. He made a hypothesis that "Each of us could have achieved our objectives with out the terrible loss for life". In war we have loss of life so this statement is ridiculous. Could we have maybe prevented a lot of life? Yes. But again hindsight is 20-20. Would of, could have and should have might be ok to look back and see the mistakes but we can never undo them. We can only hope to learn from our them. He believe's that mistake's got people killed. He believes that we needed to learn from the mistakes made on chemical warfare and the use of it. McNamara states that "One mistake and you're going to destroy nations" .

He asks "what is morally appropriate?" While there is no clear definition of chemical weapon use he says he would have never have broken the law. Now this is where he leaves me having a hard time taking his staements serious. When refering to the chemical Agent Orange being used to clear the vegetation he states "Im not really sure I authorized Agent Orange. I don't remember it but it certainly occured. The use of it occured while I was Secretary". How do you not remember if you did or did not authorize such a chemical as Agent Orange? This makes him look like a liar in my eyes and I have a hard time believing him. While he may not want to admit to beling responsible he may have been. While the Appy book details of immediate problems in the hospitals with soldiers becoming sick, diseases such as diabetes, lung cancer, tuberculosis and dysentary we at the time never thought to think about what this

chemical could do to our soldiers and civilians. Appy says "Now I suspect it may be linked to some weakening of our immune systems caused by exposure to Agent Orange" Again this is hindsight and is all great but at the time of its use we did not know the long term effects it could possibly have. This toxic chemical not only stripped the leaves from the trees but also exposed civilians and soldiers.

While McNamara believes you can't change human nature and that war is inevitable he believes that many things should have been done to protect the Vietnamese people and our soldiers. He believes that with change in decisions, lives could have been saved. When asked if he was in a "damn if you do, damn if you don't" situation he says "I would rather be damned if I don't".

We can not go back and change history or decisions that were made but we can try and learn from these mistakes. I think McNamara is unrealistic in his belief that we could have made better decisions. I think at the time we made decisions we felt were correct. As with every war we have regrets. To go back and say we did it wrong now is moot. It happened, mistakes were made and things could have been done differently. We can only hope that in future conflicts we double think actions of warfare and chemical weapon use.

Sources:

Fog of war

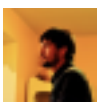
clip: http://media.lanecc.edu/users/escobarj/195/forums/week8/11_mcnamara_speak

Patriots the Vietnam War: Christian Appy

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Re: Hindsight is 20-20

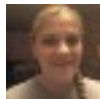


by Nick Cervantes - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 4:49 PM

I enjoyed your thoughtful post. McNamara may have given agent orange some implicit approval. Never signing off on a document that would leave him culpable, but not saying no, either. In one way he's a font of historical information about the war, and in another way he's inaccessible. Of course he knew agent orange was being used, he was the Secretary of Defense. That could be some fog he created in his own mind, but the use of agent orange (and any chemical weapon) was severe and deplorable.

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Re: Hindsight is 20-20

by Leslie Stockton - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 7:15 PM

How do you just forget if you gave approval or not? This is a huge red flag for me. The lasting effects of Agent Orange may have "fogged" his memory because of the amount of servicemen with poisoning effects to this day. I guess if you poisoned soldiers and civilians you really wouldn't want to admit that.

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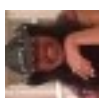
Re: Hindsight is 20-20

by Jessica Fialho - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 9:41 AM

Leslie you make a great point that some people probably wouldn't want to admit that they were the one who poisoned soldiers and civilians. I often see people who find it is easier to lie or avoid the topic instead of discussing it and admitting to their mistake. I guess it can be incredibly difficult to admit guilt and apologize. When the New York Times article says, "Even more disappointing is Mr. McNamara's unwillingness to explore the human tragedies and political legacies of this longest American war." (paragraph 15) they summarized McNamara's actions perfectly. He should have opened up all the way and admitted more of his mistakes. How can we learn and grow without first admitting that a mistake was made?

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Our understanding of the Vietnam War

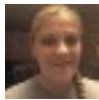
by Sohni Maan-Davie - Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 9:51 PM

The effects of my understanding of the Vietnam War, when former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara made those statements, is that we made mistakes due to human nature, and we misunderstand the enemy's view of the war. When McNamara went to Vietnam and had lunch with the Prime Minister of Vietnam, the Prime Minister thought the whole war was because the Americans were trying to enslave them, but the Americans view of the war was that they were fighting to stop the spread of Communism. When McNamara was talking about how the Americans were spraying Agent Orange onto Vietnam, and how McNamara was the secretary at the time, his memory became foggy, because he said he would "I never in the world would authorize an illegal action", then he said he wasn't sure if he authorized it because he didn't remember, but he does remember that Agent Orange was used during his time as Secretary of Defense.

If LBJ or Nixon was still alive and was in a documentary that's similar to Fog of War I don't know if they would be able to help us further understand the war. They might give us their opinion on the war, but I truly don't know, what their response would be.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Our understanding of the Vietnam War

by Leslie Stockton - Friday, November 18, 2016, 11:19 PM

I also found it interesting to hear that the Vietnamese were fighting a civil war while they thought we were there to replace french power with our own colonialist views. We definitely went to war not knowing enough about the Vietnamese people, their culture or what they were truly fighting for. This is one area that I can agree with McNamara. I think the majority of us found it "foggy" the things he was able to remember but was unable to remember events that directly impacted his role in the war. For this reason, I take a lot of what he says with a grain of salt. Tell us the truth, the WHOLE truth and nothing but the truth. Don't hold back on us after all these years of staying silent.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Mcnamara is foggie

by Meadow Benedict - Thursday, November 17, 2016, 12:00 AM

I think the understanding of the effects McNamara had on the war is not completely honest. The people in Vietnam were fighting for independence and McNamara didn't believe that is what they were doing. He also believed there should have been a law that says using chemical toxins should be against the law, but there is no clear definition of what those laws are. (Fog of War) I think he said many things that are a

little foggie in his recollections of what happened in the war. He first says he didn't authorize or no anything about the toxic agent orange. Then he says I don't remember authorizing the use of agent orange. (Fog of War). Which is it? I think he chose to be foggie on that answer. When he was asked if he wanted to go into more detail about the war, he said I am damned if I do and damned if I don't. He said I'd rather be damned if I don't. I think he is covering his own rear because he made a lot of mistakes in the Vietnam war and won't admit it. He should be honest at this point and explain honestly why we were there and why so many people had to die on both sides.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Historical Truth

by Treva Thompson-Moore - Thursday, November 17, 2016, 10:38 PM

Max Frankel has made one well rounded assessment of McNamara and the “Fog of War” with his New York Times article. This piece put into words the missing parts that explain McNamara’s reasoning for coming forward and why it took so long. The Fog of War was simply a long awaited rebuttal to the Vietnam War that a lot of people were wanting. I, Myself, seemed flustered as to why it took until 1995 for McNamara to visit Vietnam and discuss the wrongdoings of that War. It humanizes him in a sense that Max is able to give reason as to why he took so long to respond to the chaos that happened during his term of office. When max wrote, “Mr. McNamara personified the slow maturing of America's foreign policy from cocky interventionism to cost-conscious realism, yet for a generation he refused to explain his conversion, explore his mistakes, judge his colleagues or instruct posterity. The pain, or the guilt, was simply too great.” reminded me that even a government official who tries to “fix” his mistakes, may not want to speak about them or admit that they have in fact created the problem to begin with.(McNamaras Retreat)

I want to stick to my opinion in my first post that McNamara is in fact a fully bias account when it comes to his novel and video but at the same time I am aware that I did not see the entire video and I did not read the novel and that makes me waver in my stance. I have empathy for the immense burden this must have taken on such a man and understand why someone would not want to openly discuss their choices if they do not fully understand them themselves. At the same time I do believe that what he did choose to openly discuss in detail was from truth and experience. Then again, there is just no denying that he certainly held back in the areas of human casualties and chemical warfare.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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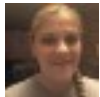
Re: Historical Truth

by Leslie Stockton - Friday, November 18, 2016, 11:13 PM

I too found him to be biased. It seems to me that he waited so long to talk about his actions and the wrongdoings because of guilt he held. Not every general or troop leader is going to believe that they made mistakes. McNamara himself is extremely sorrowful about the actions and lives lost but all this is in retrospect. It does us no good to have a man that won't even admit he authorized Agent Orange to judge the actions of others. He leads on that he knows more than he is willing to share, but why? If you are coming out now to speak up, why not tell the entire story and not just the parts that benefit his agenda? Too fishy for me.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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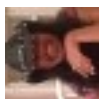
Re: Retrospect

by Leslie Stockton - Friday, November 18, 2016, 11:07 PM

Max Frankel's 1995 article about Robert McNamara told of a man with great disdain and guilt of his and others actions during the Vietnam war. A man who "drowned his sorrow in good works..". Again like *Fog of War*, it is told in retrospect or hindsight. McNamara is made out to be bitter and angry about the decisions made. And again he is foggy. "Mcnamara says he does not know to this day if whether he thus quit or was fired "maybe it was both" . while sometimes he is so sure of his actions of begging "to stop sending more men to the slaughter" but can't remember if he was fired or quit. That's kind of an important fact to omit. Just as in *Fog of war* when he states that he doesn't remember authorizing Agent Orange just that he knew it was used. He wants to complain about decisions and actions of himself and others yet leaves out vital information. From both *Fog of War* and the 1995 article, I find a man with regret and sadness that wished he could change history. It doesn't make his account very unbiased. I have a hard time believing anything he says if he "can't" remember specific details about his own time in Vietnam. Who is he to judge the actions of others when he won't even confess to his own sins?

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Re: Retrospect

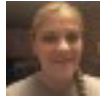
by Sohni Maan-Davie - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 7:35 PM

I agree that McNamara is leaving out vital information, him not knowing if he authorized Agent Orange is a pretty big thing that one should not forget. I truthfully believe that McNamara wants to forget his past. In the epilogue of the video, when that reporter asked that question, McNamara said no more questions, and the way McNamara sounded, made it seem like he was ashamed of what he had done, and I agree that McNamara is filled with regret and sadness and that he wish he could change history. I also agree that he shouldn't judge others when he can't

confess sins, but I can also understand why he wants to forget his role in the Vietnam War, the war has a lot of horrors, and not everybody wants to remember their role in it, even if they should confess their sins.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Retrospect

by Leslie Stockton - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 8:25 PM

I totally agree that not every one wants to remember the horrors of the war. Who would? My biggest problem is not McNamara's choice in putting in his two cents but the omissions themselves. If he wants to bring up ghost of the past bring them all up. Many have regretted actions from Vietnam but they are also not throwing people under the bus or holding actions against others for decisions that can not be changed.

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Max Frankel Got it Right

by Andrew Dellinger - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 9:53 AM

If Nixon or LBJ were alive, it would be very interesting to hear their experience of the war. I think it would absolutely add to our understanding of the war, because the experience of being a President is so unique. I am sure they would use the same selective memory tactic that McNamara used in the "Fog of War." Sadly it's hard to find a politician, or anyone for that matter, that will completely confess all of their mistakes. I would be very interested to hear if LBJ would back up his middle ground strategy, and if Nixon would defend his authorizing of combat missions into Laos. As for the *New York Times* article, I think Max Frankel did a great job critiquing the former Secretary of Defense on his half-hearted confession. Frankel points out numerous instances where McNamara left out information, or simply didn't give an answer. For instance, Frankel remarks on the fact that McNamara never once talked about the human element, leaving us wondering "what was it like to send tens of thousands to their deaths in an increasingly dubious cause?" To me, this is a sign of a man haunted by his past decisions, and the effect it had. I'm sure McNamara tries his hardest not to think of the massive loss of life that resulted from the decisions he contributed to. In that light, it is easy to understand why he would be so selectively "foggy," but in reality I don't think it is right for him to not convey the truth to the American public. As a government official he has a duty to the people, especially to those of which affected by the war, to be transparent especially about a past event. As students studying the war however, I believe it is also important to remember the confusion and difficulty involved with such decisions. We should absolutely judge

certain decisions made during the war, and realize the effect they had; but also remember that war is war, and it would be impossible for anyone to know all the possible variables as it went on.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Max Frankel Got it Right

by Jessica Fialho - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 12:37 PM

Andrew thank you for discussing the New York Times article. I agree with you that Max Frankel did a great job at his critiquing. This helped give me more perspective about McNamara leaving out information. It sounds like many people believe McNamara isn't giving all the truth or the full picture as a conscious decision. I want to give McNamara the benefit of the doubt that he is haunted by his decisions and isn't leaving information out on purpose, but it is difficult to really tell. I think we often forget about how even our politicians are humans and have a breaking point. For some, that may have been Vietnam War. Even with that I agree with you Andrew, McNamara absolutely has a duty to the American public and he should tell the truth. Especially so we can learn from it and help prepare for any future conflicts.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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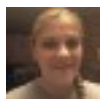
Re: Max Frankel Got it Right

by Andrew Dellinger - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 5:08 PM

Hi Jessica, I agree with you that McNamara could actually have forgotten certain details due to stress, but I believe he is simply not telling the whole truth. He even admits it at the end of the video. It's very disheartening that someone sworn to serve the American people won't own up to some of his mistakes, yet he is quick to critique other officials he worked with.

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Re: Max Frankel Got it Right

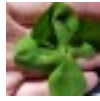
by Leslie Stockton - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 7:11 PM

I too believe he is not telling the truth. I also find it hypocritical of him to judge others when he won't admit to his own actions. If he knows more why does he refuse to tell the whole story ? He admits people are already mad at

him for this so why would he not just let it all out. Can't be any more mad about it then people already are.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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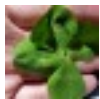
Re: Max Frankel Got it Right

by Jessica Fialho - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 9:25 AM

Andrew thank you for your response. After re evaluating the end of the Fog of War Video clip, I see what you are saying. At the end McNamara does state "And I'd rather be damned if I don't" (11:33) when referring to giving more information. I hope our current leaders don't follow trend to McNamara. I agree with you, it is incredibly disheartening that he can't own up to his mistakes.

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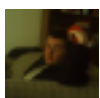
Gathering data

by Jessica Fialho - Saturday, November 19, 2016, 12:24 PM

Now Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara does have his own view of the war and details he wishes to discuss, but I consider the Appy book and Herring book better at gathering a variety of perspectives. I would not want to only rely on McNamara's material for my understanding of the war. He does give me another perspective, but from the pieces I have gathered, It is obvious he doesn't have a clear memory on some of the events. Regardless if his "fogginess" it's accidental or on purpose, I believe we all can agree that if we used only McNamara's documentary for data it would be a mistake. However, having more material to gather data from is never a bad thing. I just find that the Appy book is better at helping us understand the war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Decisions of the past

by Jimmy O'Neal - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 12:54 PM

After taking the survey questions I would have to say that I do believe this course has swayed my opinions on some of the questions. Before I took this course I had a very open mindset about a few things, I believed that we should try and help countries that were "in need" of aid and that we should defend countries that seemed defenseless but now I think that the US should just mind its own business. If we keep sticking our noses in conflicts that we don't have any business in then we will just keep making more and more enemies, so I believe that we need to focus on problems here at home, like decreasing the poverty and crime rate of our country.

As for the second question, I do believe that it is fair to judge our past leaders for their actions. If we just let it pass by then we won't really learn anything from their failures, so I believe that it is our duty to judge their actions. As the old saying goes "history is doomed to repeat itself", well I think that if we find out what was wrong with what they did and avoid making the same mistakes in the future that we will be much better off in the long run.

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Re: Decisions of the past

by Andrew Dellinger - Sunday, November 20, 2016, 5:03 PM

Jimmy, my responses were also affected, but in a different way than yours it seems. While I do believe that in certain situations America should let other countries deal with their own problems, I firmly think that America (and our allies) have a responsibility to protect the weak from the evil. A big lesson I learned from this course is that although the domino theory was created out of fear of communism, in a time when we let fear of nuclear war drive our decisions, it did prove to be somewhat true. Communism did spread throughout Indochina, and mass executions and massive human rights violations followed soon after we left Vietnam (PBS Ep: 8). We can use this lesson from Vietnam to evaluate what is currently happening in the Middle East. If America and our allies sit idly by, as Isis spreads its influence and destruction, we can surely expect similar outcomes as the aftermath of Indochina after the war. However, the most important lesson is our failure to find a way to cooperate with the South Vietnamese government by making them so dependent on our aid. We could use this lesson in countries like Iraq, and other places we are involved in, when dealing with their governments. Also, we should keep in mind that our lack of understanding Vietnamese culture caused numerous problems in our involvement there. Overall I think that when it comes to protecting human rights America should help the oppressed, and we can do this more effectively if we pay close attention to the lessons from the Vietnam War.

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